いとめぐりの素描
青井秋
Aki Aoi

Lovely Strange Dark

ITOMEGURI NO SOBYOU
"A CANVAS OF SPUN YARN"
BY AOI AKI
CHAPTER 1

Raws & translation: Kurenai
Editing: Noir Schist
QC: hahhah42

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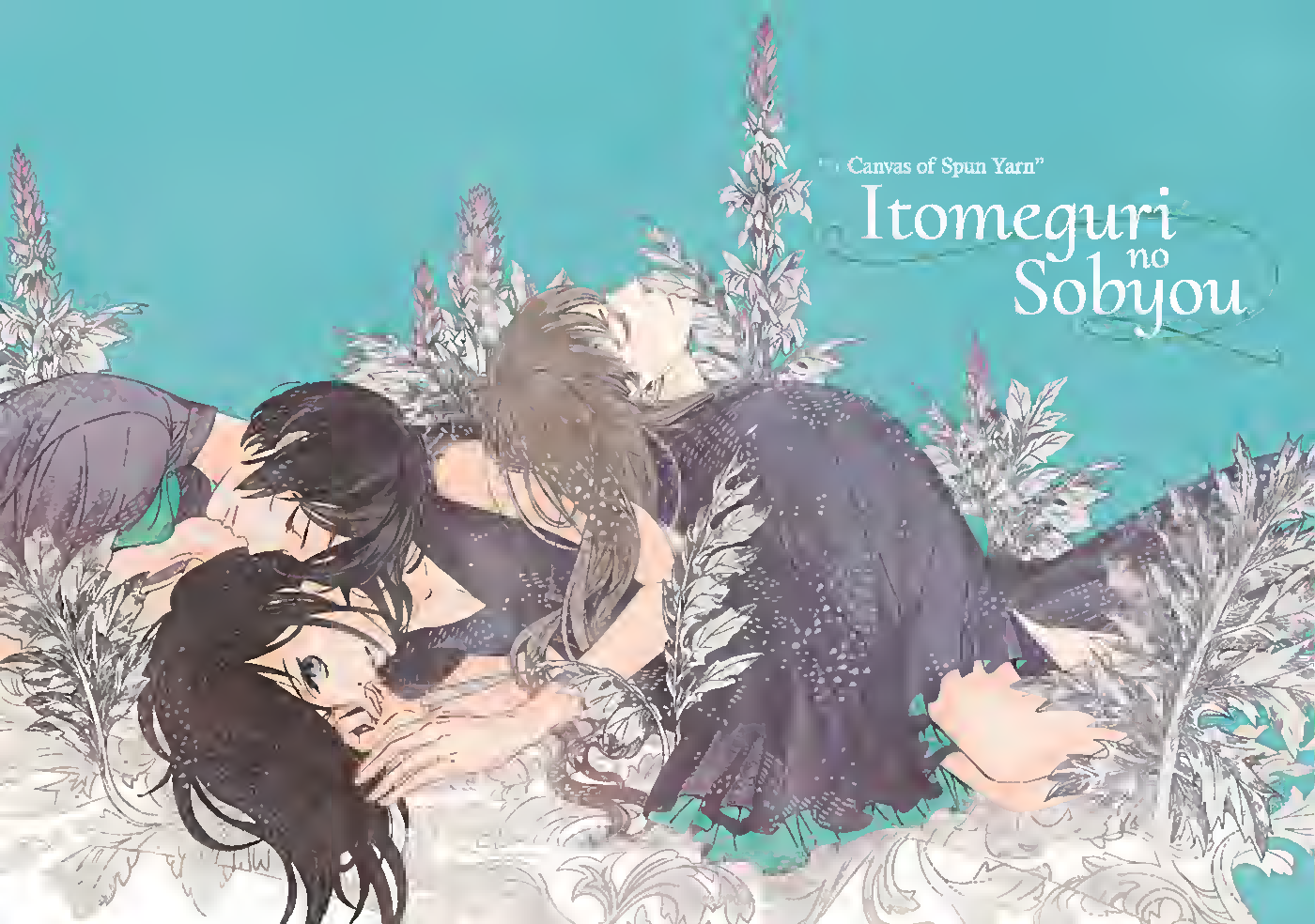
"Canvas of Spun Yarn"
Itomeguri no Sobyou

いとめぐりの素描

Itomeguri no Sobyou

青井 秋
Aki Aoi

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Itomeguri no Sobyou

Aki Aoi

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リリカル
ストリップ

いとめくりの素描

Stitch | 青井秋 Aki

chapter one

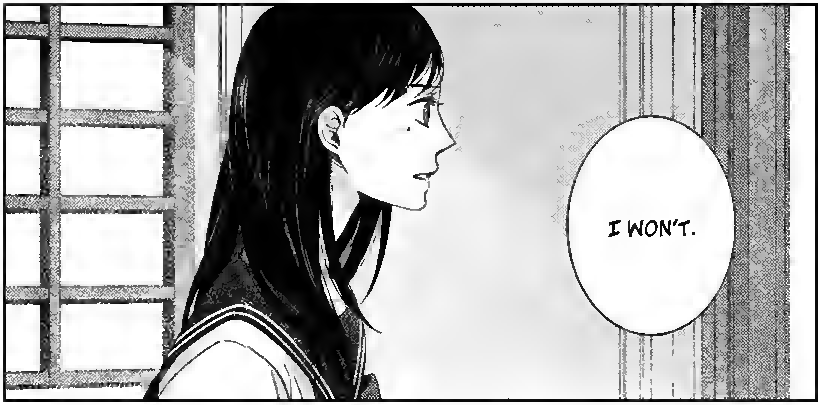
Delicate threads— scattered here, there, every- where—
come together, stitch by stitch..

this color.
...forming, in the blink of an eye,
BEEP BEEP BEEP
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

BEEP BEEP BEEP
TAP
MORNING!
NUIKO, SIT DOWN AND EAT. YOU'RE RUNNING LATE
MORNING
YES, MOM.
HOW'S THE HAN-ERI* COMING ALONG?
I THINK I'LL BE DONE BY THE END OF THE WEEK.

*DECORATIVE COLLAR ATTACHED TO A JUBAN (INNER KIMONO)

*BOLT OF FABRIC USED TO MAKE A KIMONO



TAP TAP
THANKS!
GOOD LUCK, NUIKO
BYE! I'M OFF!
OH!
THERE SHE IS

WHAT ELSE?
WHAT'S THAT?
MORNING.
MORNING.
WHOA. AND THIS MAKES HIM GUY NUMBER ...?
ARE YOU GOING TO GO OUT WITH HIM?
N-NOT SO LOUD. HE ONLY GAVE ME HIS NUMBER THAT'S ALL.
YOU MEAN...
ANOTHER LOVE LETTER?
SLIDE
BACK TO YOUR SEATS!
YOU GUYS!.
OF COURSE NOT
DO YOU EVEN NEED TO ASK? TOMOE ONLY HAS EYES FOR ONE GUY

WANNA DROP BY THE BOOK-STORE ON THE WAY HOME?
SORRY I'VE GOT BALLET.
CAN'T. I PROMISED MOM I'D CLEAN OUT THE CLOSET TODAY.
OH, OK.
TOMORROW THEN?
THAT WORKS.
SURE!
GREAT!
HANG ON, AKARI. I THOUGHT YOUR BALLET LESSONS WERE ON WEDNES-DAYS?
NUHHHH
YES, BUT MY INSTRUCTOR SAID TO COME TODAY.
SEEMS TO ME YOU'VE BEEN WORKING EXTRA HARD.
NUIKO, YOU BROUGHT YOUR HOOP AGAIN.
YEAH, WELL, I'D RATHER NOT DEAL WITH GRANDPA BREATHING DOWN MY NECK.

RIGHT. YOUR FAMILY PRODUCES JAPANESE EMBROIDERY.
YEP.
HE'D BE ALL, "YOU HAVE BASICS TO MASTER. FORGET EVERYTHING ELSE."
...
THAT'S THE GRANDPA I KNOW.
SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE CRAFTSMAN
AND OFF IN HER OWN WORLD

AH!
FOUND IT!
OW,
OWWW
bonk
...?
WHAT WAS THAT SOUND? ARE YOU OK?
MOM, LOOK.

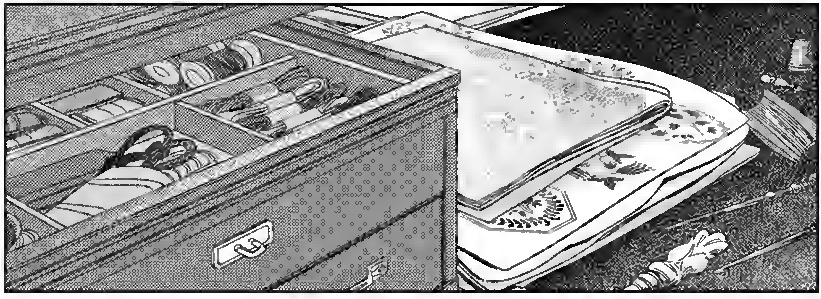
I FOUND THIS WHEN I WAS LOOKING FOR OLD SCRAPS
OH!
THAT'S
IT'S YOUR GRANDMA'S KIT.
SO IT WAS IN THERE ALL ALONG
ARE THEY ALL VINTAGE?
THAT THEY ARE SHE COLLECTED SAMPLERS AND OTHER THINGS
SAMPLERS?
A SAMPLER IS A PIECE OF CLOTH WITH ALL SORTS OF STITCHES ON IT, FOR PRACTICE AND REFERENCE
THIS HERE IS FROM HER HANDKERCHIEF COLLECTION
IT'S GORGEOUS.

MOM, MIND IF I BORROW THIS?

IT'S ALMOST DINNER-TIME
I COULD USE YOUR HELP IN THE KITCHEN.

DON'T WORRY. I WON'T

AS LONG AS YOU DON'T LET IT INTERFERE WITH GRANDPA'S ASSIGNMENT.



THAT REMINDS ME
GRANDMA FAVORED VINTAGE
"Old things have changed hands...
and traveled far and wide.
LOOK HOW MUCH DETAIL GOES INTO IT.
Their history is rich beyond anyone's imagination."

I wonder who stitched it.
MUI HENG,
COULD YOU BUY ME SOME TEA?
OF COURSE, MAMA.

HELLO. MUI HENG THE USUAL?
GOOD DAY
YES, PLEASE
I'M GETTING THE HANG OF IT.
HOW IS WORK?
HELLO THERE
GOOD DAY, MR. NG.
YOUR LAST MOTIF WAS POPULAR WITH THE CUSTOMERS
GLAD TO HEAR THAT
I APPRECIATE
YOUR HARD WORK
I'LL DELIVER THE NEXT ONE SOON.
!
THANK YOU.

THE NEXT ONE...
...
BUTTERFLIES AGAINST SWIRLING FOLIAGE, SPRINKLED WITH BERRIES AND FLOWER PETALS.
AN EXQUISITE DESIGN...
FOR LADIES ABROAD TO SHOW OFF AT SOIRÉES.
I live in an old port town with gray walls.
My world is forever closed off.

I've had the embroidery hoop for as long as I can remember
My mother passed it down to me.
I'm certain I will keep stitching for the rest of my life.
This rather bleak town isn't entirely without delight.
As long as I find joy...
in every bird or flower I stitch,
I shall remain here.

IT'S LIKE LACE
VERY IMPRESSIVE DRAWN THREAD WORK
THE MOTIF ITSELF IS TRADITIONAL CHINESE, THOUGH
SWATOW EMBROIDERY, HUH? YOU CAN SEE THE BELGIAN INFLUENCE IN THE WHITE WORK TECHNIQUE

BUT GRANDPA WILL THROW A FIT IF HE FINDS OUT
I WANT TO GIVE IT A TRY
I COULD DO IT IN MY SPARE TIME
COTTON AND HEMP...
I CAN USE THE SAME NEEDLE FOR BOTH, RIGHT?
I KNOW I SHOULD FOCUS ON ONE THING SO I DON'T MESS UP, BUT...

...I DON'T WANT TO.
The time I spend stitching the world onto fabric,
the way I like it,
means *everything* to me.

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chapter two
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
YES, MADAM.
NEXT LESSON WILL BE IN FULL COSTUME.
YOUR BEAUTIFUL HAIR, ALL GONE.
IT'S A REAL SHAME.

IT DOESN'T MATTER
NOT AFTER WINTER
BUT SHE'S OUR PRINCIPAL.
PREPARING FOR COLLEGE SUCKS
IS AKARI SERIOUSLY CALLING IT QUITS?
AT THE END OF THE YEAR, I THINK?

chapter
two

OH? THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU WORKED ON LAST WEEK
MORNING, AKARI
MORNING
AND YOU'VE GOT YOUR GRANDPA'S ASSIGNMENT TO BOOT
HOW ARE YOU KEEP-ING UP?
THIS ONE'S MORE OF A MINI PROJECT, THOUGH
WELL, I DID FIND A BUNCH OF SAMPLERS

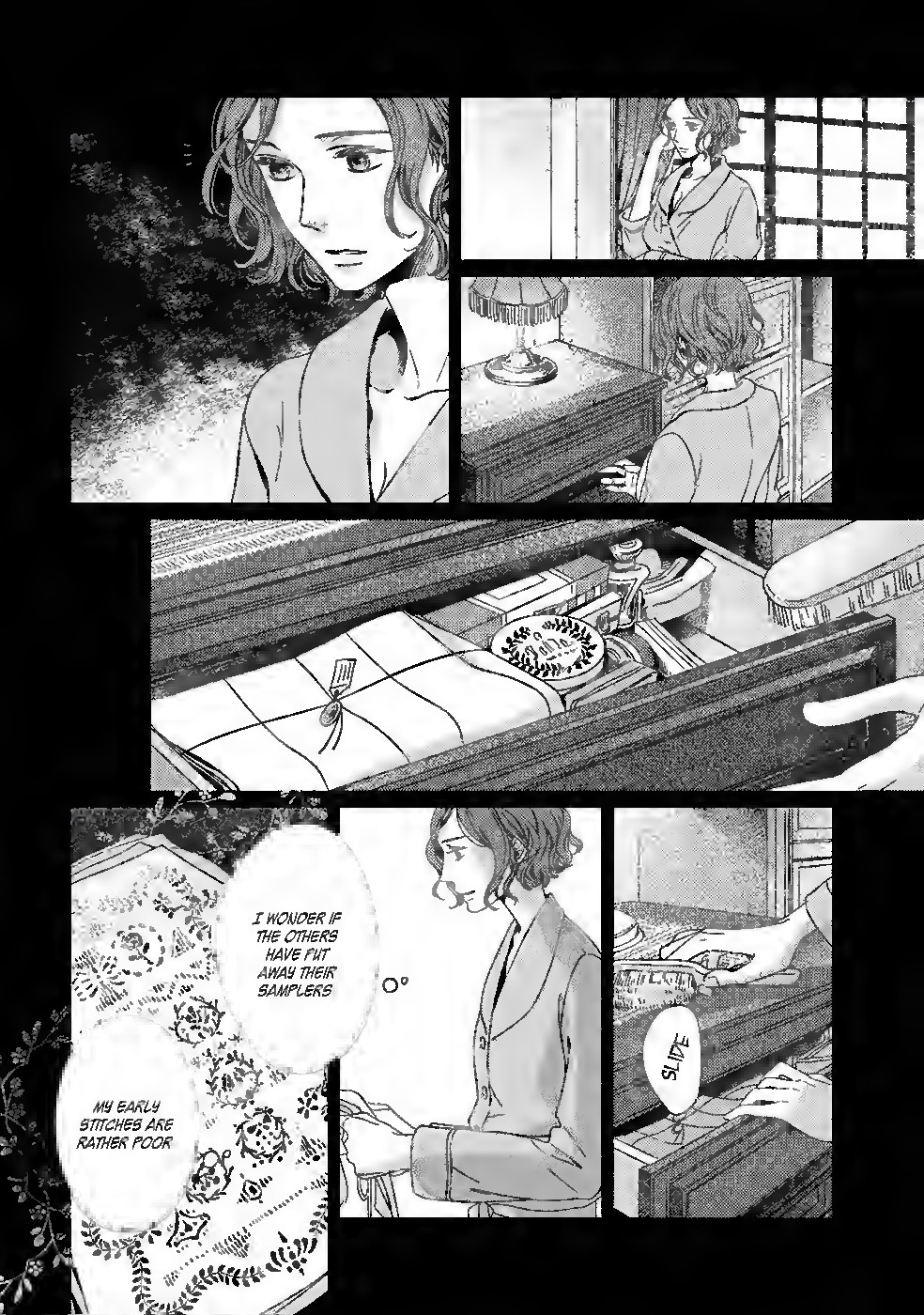
TALK ABOUT HAVING A ONE-TRACK MIND
SO WE HAVE A CAREER COUNSELING SESSION NEXT WEEK
DECIDED YET?
JUNIOR COLLEGE FOR ME
I DON'T KNOW, HONESTLY WE'RE ONLY JUNIORS
WON'T BE LONG UNTIL SENIOR YEAR

JUST THINK, NEXT YEAR, OUR FUTURE WILL BE SET IN STONE.
DAMN IF I'M NOT SCARED
NUIKO, SORRY IT TOOK SO—
HAH

ALICIA,
WHEN CAN YOU FINISH?
THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE MOTIF? WITHIN THE DAY, I EXPECT
MA'AM, THE INDIGO NO. 25 FLOSS HAS ARRIVED
OH, JUST IN TIME! THANK GOODNESS.
YOU'VE BEEN SUCH A DEAR

THERE'S BEEN A RUSH OF ACTIVITY AT THE SCHOOL
THE FLAG IS GOING TO IRELAND, ISN'T IT?
MY OLDER BROTHER IS AN OFFICER AT THE FRONT LINE. I'M PLEASED TO KNOW I'M HELPING IN SOME WAY.
INDEED THOUGH I DO HOPE THE WAR WILL END SOON.
IS IT AS RAINY AND FOGGY AS LONDON...
Ireland.
A land I've never known
WHERE THE FLAG WILL FLY?

In a place I've never been to...
my goldwork may be the last color...
that some soldier will see.
FANCY THAT
YES, FANCY THAT
I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW
GOOD DAY, EVERYONE


I WONDER IF THE OTHERS HAVE PUT AWAY THEIR SAMPLERS
MY EARLY STITCHES ARE RATHER POOR
SLIDE

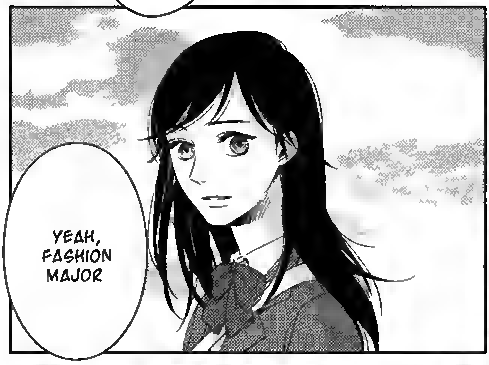
I RAN OUT OF FLOSS HERE MARGARET GAVE ME SOME, BUT HERS ISN'T QUITE THE RIGHT SHADE
WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER SINCE WE LEFT SCHOOL I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY WHEREVER YOU ARE, MARGARET,
AND THAT YOU LOVE YOUR WORK
I help make war flags at the school.
Under royal patronage, naturally. I take part in the war effort.
But sometimes...
I feel lost, unanchored adrift

What I must do. What I can do.
What I want to do.
They're unreconciled. Ever changing.
I don't know what's in store for tomorrow.
And yet...
I CREATE MY OWN WORLDS WITH MY NEEDLE AND THREAD.
IT'S MY ONLY JOY.
the feeling that arises each time I look at these cloths...

...is the one thing...
I'm certain of.
NUIKO,
LET'S GO HOME

TOMOE'S WAITING FOR US AT THE GATES

I MET UP WITH THE GIRLS FROM CLASS 3
THEIR MAIN TOPIC WAS EXAMS


YEAH, FASHION MAJOR

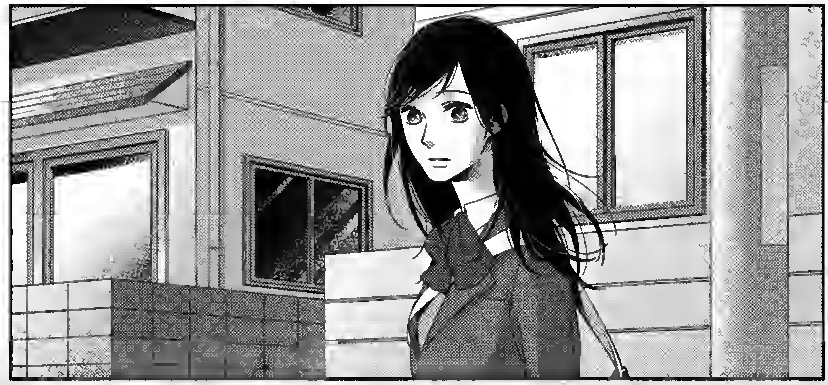
I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE GOING TO BE SENIORS SOON
I DON'T KNOW WHERE I WANT TO GO YET
NUIKO, YOU'RE GOING TO AN ART SCHOOL, RIGHT?

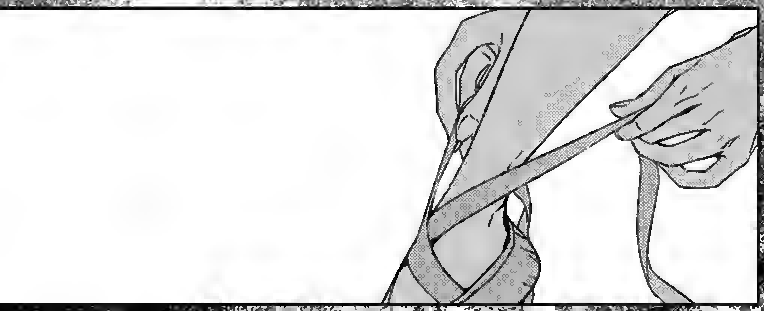
THERE'S SO MUCH TO LEARN BEFORE I CAN TAKE OVER THE FAMILY BUSI-NESS
WOW

SHE'S KNOWN ALL THAT SINCE GRADE SCHOOL
NUIKO'S NOT YOUR AVERAGE GIRL
MY NAME IS NUIKO HARADA, SEAT #18
WHEN I GROW UP, I WANT TO BE—
WELL, I'M GOING TO DO EMBROIDERY.
...
THERE'S A GIRL LIKE THAT IN THIS CLASS.
She sounded so confident
So matter-of-fact

It wasn't her dream or goal
It was her future, simple as that.
THAT'S AMAZING, NUIKO
I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE AKARI SAID SHE WANTED TO BE A BALLERINA

I'M NOTHING LIKE YOU.





XII
III
IV
V
VI
VII
VIII
IX
X

I'M AKARI IKUSHIMA SEAT #2
WHEN I GROW UP,
I WANT TO BE A BALLERINA
When I was ten,
dancing was as natural to me as breathing.
clap
clap
NICE TO MEET ALL OF YOU

Ballet molds my muscles and beats my bones into shape
My entire body is made for dancing
When my toe leaves the ground,
all sounds fade into the background.

The only thing that matters...
is the rhythm of my body.
It gets so quiet, my ears almost bleed.

Back then,
I thought it would last forever.
The linoleum floor of the stage...
was my whole world.
THUD

BUT...
I CAN'T LIVE LIKE NUIKO.
The day I found out all my hard work was for noth-ing...
is the day I learned the meaning of self-doubt.

I WISH...

I COULD DANCE FOR LIFE...

WITHOUT A CARE IN THE WORLD

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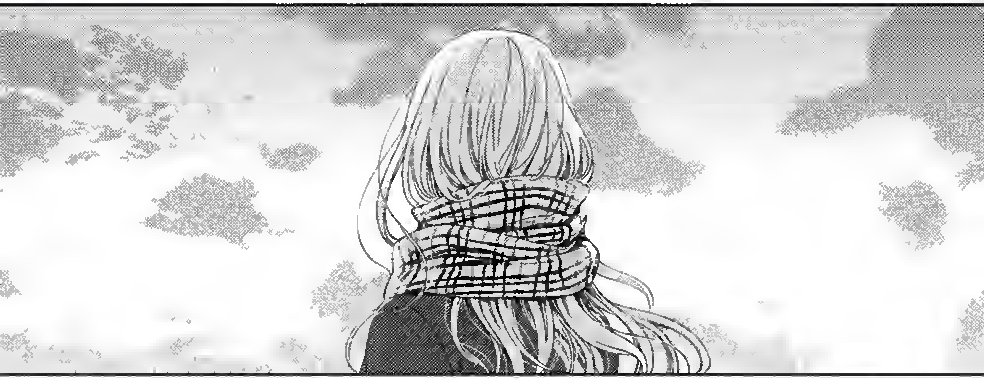
I LIKE YOU.



HUH?

I SAID...

I LIKE YOU, TOMOE.

B-

BUT, HIRO—

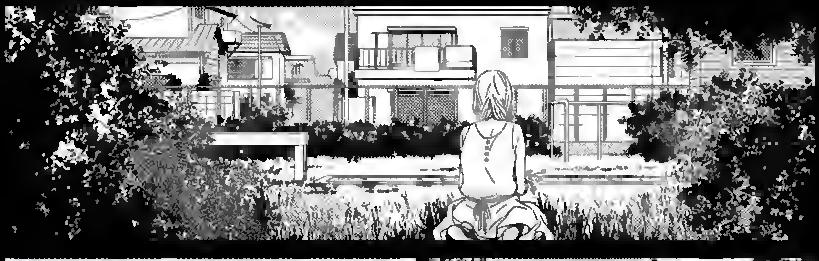
I THOUGHT...
WE BROKE UP...
—AREN'T YOU SEEING SOMEONE ELSE?
I SAW YOU LIKE A LITTLE SISTER...
BUT THEN I REALIZED...
NO ONE ELSE COMES CLOSE TO YOU
TO...
TOMOE.

chapter
three

That was three months ago. Spring break is over.
Now we're in our last year of high school
The future is supposed to be within our reach.
But mine is vague and tepid.
Like an unfriendly stranger.

The end of last winter was like any other,
but it was different, too.
OH.
SORRY
TOMOE? C'MON

I BARELY TALK TO MY OLD FRIENDS ANYMORE.
BUT YOU GUYS ARE STILL CLOSE
WAS THAT YAMAZAKI?
YEP.
WHAT? REALLY?
I CAN'T IMAGINE BOYS MAKING YOU CRY NOW. TOO WEIRD.
YOU KNOW, WHEN WE WERE KIDS, HE USED TO MAKE ME CRY
THOUGH HE ALWAYS CAME TO MY RESCUE WHEN OTHER KIDS PICKED ON ME.
'CAUSE I'M SLOW, SEE.
ALL THE TIME I DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS.
ARE YOU SERIOUS?



HIRO...
C'MON EVERYBODY'S PLAYING DODGEBALL

HEY, PLAYING ON YOUR OWN AGAIN?

KNOW WHAT?

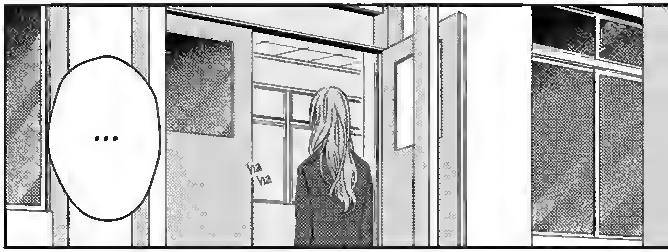
UM, I'LL PASS.
I'M NO GOOD AT IT.

THAT'S EXACTLY WHY YOU DON'T HAVE FRIENDS

HIRO, DUDE. IF SHE JOINS OUR TEAM, WE'LL LOSE LIKE LAST TIME.
SAY THAT ONE MORE TIME. I DARE YOU.
...
IT'S OK, HIRO.
THEY'RE TELLING THE TRUTH.
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE ANGRY!

ELSE PEOPLE WILL KEEP MAKING FUN OF YOU!
YOU'RE THE FIRST ONE TO PICK ON ME, BUT...
YOU STAND UP FOR ME, TOO.
WHY'RE YOU BLAMING ME?
UH-OH...
LOOK WHO MADE TOMOE CRY AGAIN.

I LIKE YOU.
gasp
TOMOE? WE HAVE MUSIC NEXT, Y'KNOW. THIS WAY.
MMM?
GUYS?
UM...
UH...
UM...
OH HURRY UP THREE MINUTES MORE.
WILL DO
SORRY. I NEED TO GO THE RESTROOM.
DON'T LET ME HOLD YOU BACK.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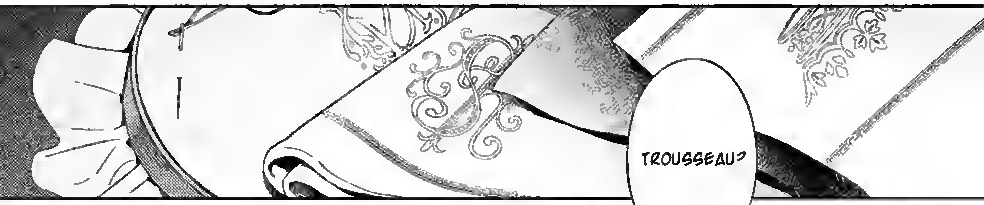
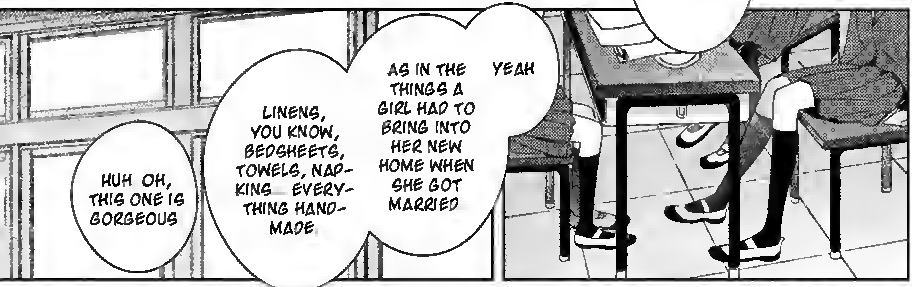
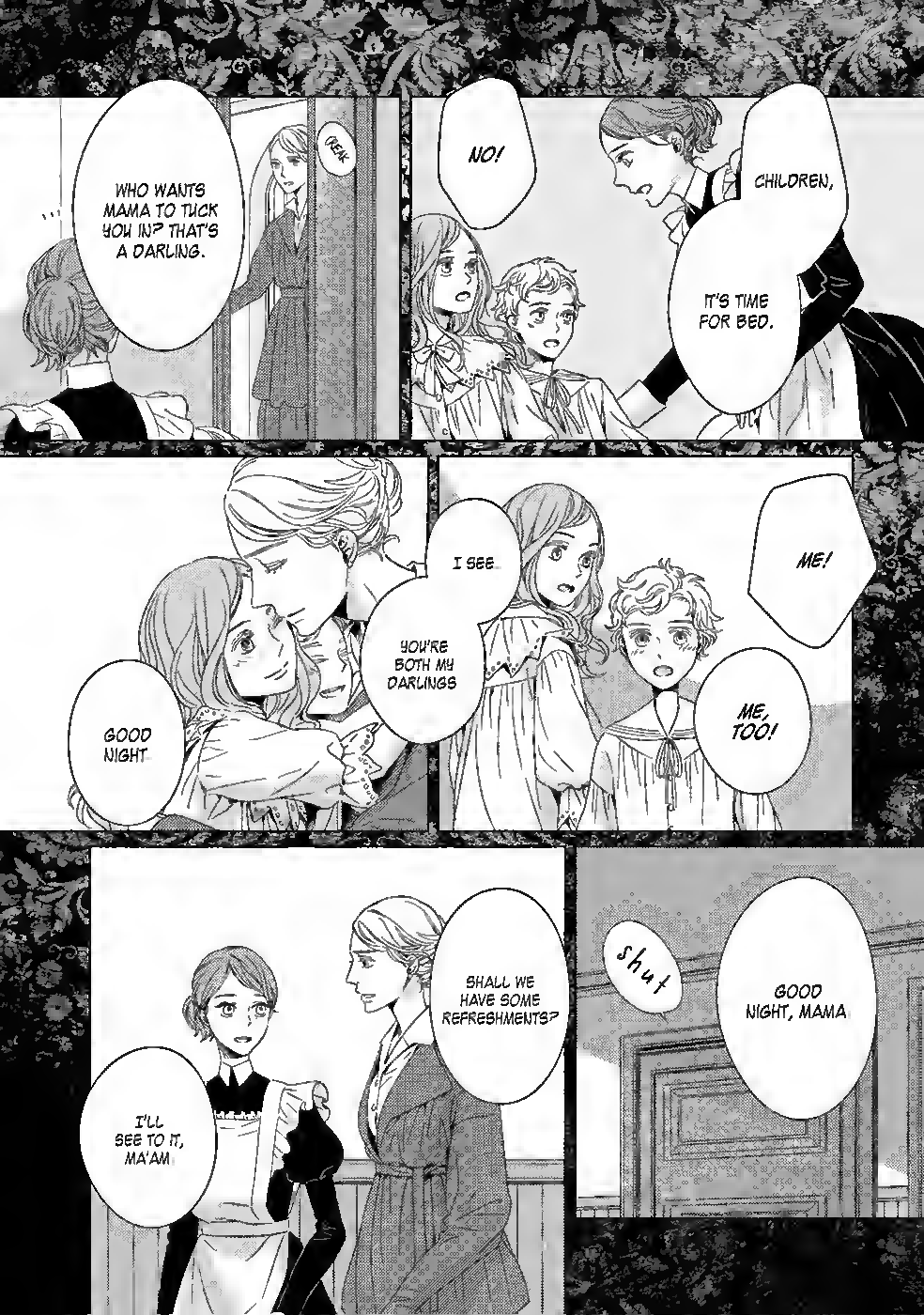

TROUSSEAU?


HUH OH, THIS ONE IS GORGEOUS
LINENS, YOU KNOW, BEDSHEETS, TOWELS, NAPKING... EVERYTHING HANDMADE
AS IN THE THINGS A GIRL HAD TO BRING INTO HER NEW HOME WHEN SHE GOT MARRIED
YEAH

I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO SEW THEM ALL
BACK IN THE DAY, THEY COULD DO IT BECAUSE THEY DEDICATED THEIR LIVES TO STARTING A FAMILY
I KNOW I THOUGHT I'D DROWN IN THE LIST

MY MOM TELLS ME IT'S FRENCH FROM THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
BUT WOW IT MUST'VE TAKEN AGES

IT'S SAD, THOUGH, WHEN I THINK ABOUT HOW THE TROUSSEAU CAME INTO MY HANDS
I MEAN, SOMEONE PAINSTAKINGLY PREPARED IT FOR HER FAMILY, AND NOW IT'S IN SOME FARAWAY COUNTRY
BUT I CAN'T HELP BEING FLOORED WHEN I LOOK AT IT
SQUEAK
TAP TAP


CREAK
WHO WANTS MAMA TO TUCK YOU IN? THAT'S A DARLING.
NO!
CHILDREN, IT'S TIME FOR BED.
GOOD NIGHT
I SEE YOU'RE BOTH MY DARLINGS
ME!
ME, TOO!
SHALL WE HAVE SOME REFRESHMENTS?
I'LL SEE TO IT, MA'AM
shut
GOOD NIGHT, MAMA

LIKE SO. YOU'RE A QUICK LEARNER.
YES. STITCH TOWARDS THE CENTER.
HERE'S YOUR TEA.
THANK YOU, COLETTE. COME SIT WITH ME.
OH, MY.
IN THE ORPHANAGE, I WAS KNOWN AS THAT CLUMSY GIRL.
ONLY BECAUSE I HAVE A GOOD TEACHER IN YOU, MA'AM.
OH. YES. ALWAYS PRICKING MY FINGERS.
YOU, MA'AM?
I WAS ALL THUMBS MYSELF AS A GIRL.
BY THE TIME I WAS PREPARING MY TROUSSEAU...
I GREW UP BEING TAUGHT TO BE A WIFE. HOWEVER, SO I WAS ALREADY USED TO NEEDLEWORK.

I WONDER WHERE MY HUSBAND IS ON THE BATTLE-FIELD
HE HASN'T ANSWERED MY LETTERS IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS.
SOON THIS PLACE WILL BE A WAR ZONE.
I MUST KEEP THE CHILDREN AND OUR HOME SAFE
WE MUST STAY ALIVE FOR THERE TO BE A REUNION AT ALL.
COLETTE,
I THINK WE SHOULD ALL LEAVE
...
IN OUR TIME HERE AS EVACU-EES, YOU'VE BEEN A GREAT SOURCE OF RELIEF AND COMFORT

WHEN IT'S ALL OVER, I'M SURE YOU'LL WANT TO PREPARE YOUR OWN TROUSSEAU.
UNTIL THEN.
WILL YOU STAY WITH US?
Numbered kitchen towels, patiently awaiting their turn
Bedsheets, ensuring a good night's sleep
Napkins, constant companions at the dining table

A FAMILY OF MY OWN...
EVEN THOUGH I NEVER KNEW MY PARENTS?
Someday, will I devote my life to someone,
like the linens so meticulously crafted by my mistress?
spending my days with my family, perfectly content.
Idyllic.
That's the kind of future she envisioned for me.
YES, MA'AM,
IF YOU'LL HAVE ME.
Does that mean...
I'm allowed to hope and dream...

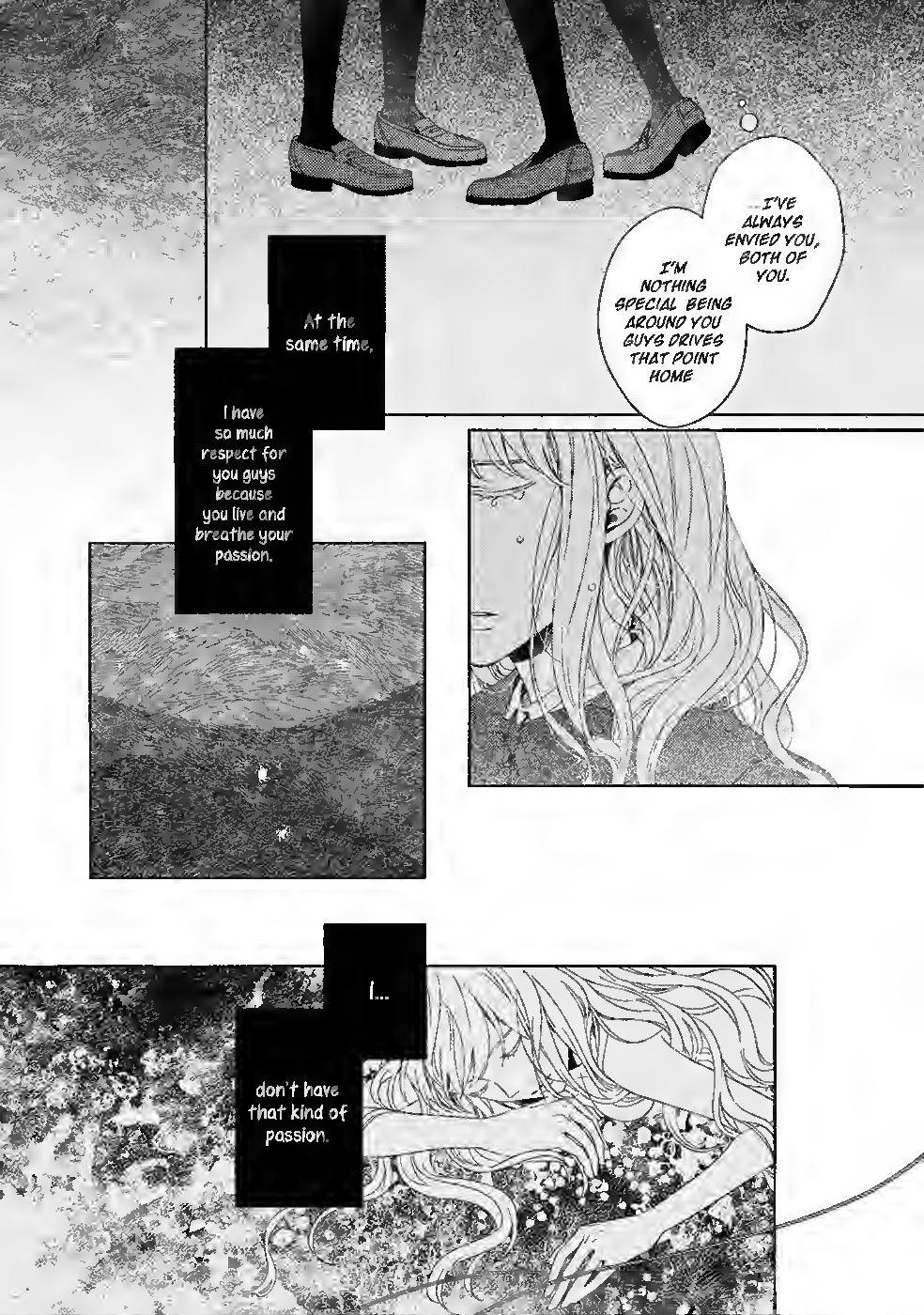
...for a future both ordinary and out of my league?
HERE'S MY STOP, GUYS
SEE YOU TOMORROW
GOOD LUCK
BYE.
FOR YOUR GRANDPA'S ASSIGNMENT?
YEAH. I HAVE UNTIL THIS WEEKEND.

INCREDIBLE, HUH?
SHE'S SO DEDICATED, SILLY GIRL. ALWAYS HAS BEEN
NO ROOM FOR OTHER THINGS
I CAN'T BE LIKE THAT
BUT... AREN'T YOU THE SAME?
TOMOE, I
I'M QUITTING BALLET

I JUST CAN'T SEE MYSELF AS A SUCCESSFUL PRO BALLERINA DOWN THE ROAD.
SO I'M GETTING OUT BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE. IT'S THE ONLY WAY.
I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT LONG AND HARD.
WHAT?
NUIKO DOESN'T KNOW, EITHER. I'M NOT SURE HOW TO TELL HER.
SORRY I KEPT IT A SECRET.
YEAH, I DON'T KNOW.
I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE I WANT TO DO.
AS LONG AS I'M FREE TO DANCE, ANY JOB WOULD DO.
SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

HEY.
WHY ARE YOU CRYING?
HUH?
S-SORRY
BUT...
YOU WORKED SO HARD TO GET TO WHERE YOU ARE
AND NOW...
DON'T CRY
YOU COULD HELP ME PICK A CAREER
YEAH.

I'M SORRY.
I DON'T KNOW IF THERE'S ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP,
BUT I'LL BE HERE IF YOU NEED ME.
I THOUGHT...
YOU HAD NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
OK.
AKARI,
TO BE COMPLETELY HONEST...


...I'VE ALWAYS ENVIED YOU, BOTH OF YOU.
I'M NOTHING SPECIAL BEING AROUND YOU GUYS DRIVES THAT POINT HOME
At the same time,
I have so much respect for you guys because you live and breathe your passion.
I...
don't have that kind of passion.

But ..
there is one thing I cherish above all else.
One thing I hold on to.
TOMOE.
WHAT ARE YOU WRITING?
D-DON'T!
FLIP
I want to see that smile
for the rest of my life.

IT'S TOTALLY YOU.
HUH.
My precious little secret.
Tomor-row...

all about my love life and the future I see for myself.
I'll tell them...

I hope...
they won't laugh at me.

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少女の夢は時代と越え、
繰り返される物語
リリカルストーリー
24P
いとめぐりの素描
Stitch 4
Aoi Seki
青井 秋

chapter
four

YAMAZAKI IS YOUR BOY-FRIEND?!
SINCE WHEN?
SINCE JANUARY...
THREE MONTHS, AND RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES!
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US EARLIER?
S-SORRY. IT WAS TOO EMBAR-RASSING.
SHEESH! CONGRATS, THOUGH!
I TAKE BACK ALL THE TIMES I CALLED HIM STUPID IN MY HEAD FOR MISSING OUT,
'CAUSE HE'S REALLY NOT.
I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU.

THANK YOU.
STILL, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT—
THEY'D LIKED EACH OTHER FOR YEARS?
YEAH.
SAME.

GOT TOO CAUGHT UP WITH MY OWN PROBLEMS
NOTHING
HUH?
WHAT'D YOU SAY?
C'MON, NUIKO
LET'S NOT KEEP YOUR FAMILY WAITING
OK.
IT'S BEEN TOO LONG, AKARI
COME ON IN

*A BALLET IN TWO ACTS, FIRST PERFORMED IN PARIS IN 1846

FROWN
IT'S SET IN SPAIN.
SPEAKING OF, LAGARTERA AND MAJORCA ARE FAMOUS FOR THEIR EMBR
NUIKO,
I HOPE YOU'RE NOT FORGETTING YOUR ASSIGN-MENT.
I'M WORKING ON IT.
PUT YOUR HEART AND SOUL INTO IT.
I KNOW, GRANDPA.
chuckle

I SHOULD'VE BEEN MORE CAREFUL.
BECAUSE HE DOESN'T LIKE YOU GETTING DISTRACTED?
YEAH.
HE'S SO BULLHEADED.
BUT HE HAS THAT STRONG, SILENT THING GOING FOR HIM.
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY YOU DON'T KNOW HIM LIKE I DO
I'D TAKE EMBROIDERY ASSIGNMENTS OVER STUDYING ANY DAY, THOUGH.
THERE'S NO END TO QUIZZES AND TESTS THESE DAYS
THEY'RE NOT LETTING US FORGET IT'S OUR FINAL YEAR
MAN.

WE NEED A DIVERSION.
TIME FOR A BREAK!
ALREADY?
I HAVE A FEELING IT'S NOT A BREAK FOR YOU.
WELL, IT HELPS CALM ME DOWN.
RIGHT.
HEY. HOW ARE THE REHEARSALS GOING? ALL GOOD?
IT'S ALL GOOD.
WE'VE GOT THE CHOREOGRAPHY DOWN PAT.

...
NUIKO
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I LAST SAW A BALLET.
CAN'T WAIT
YOUR...
CURRENT PROJECT...
MM?
LET'S SEE.
FORMER SOVIET... GEORGIAN, I THINK.
YEAH WHERE'S IT FROM?
THIS?

OH, IT'S PRETTY.
IT'S A FOLK DANCE COSTUME.
I THINK THIS IS A WOMAN'S OUTFIT.
APPARENTLY, THE MEN DANCE WITH SWORDS AND DAGGERS
YOUR GRANDMA SURE KEPT AN EXTENSIVE COLLECTION
I HAD NO IDEA SHE HAD ONE
MOST OF THEM I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE IN MY LIFE
SHE MUST HAVE REALLY LOVED EMBROIDERY.

JUST LIKE YOU.
GRANDMA?
She always had answers for my questions
Her wrinkled fingers worked magic on cloth.
I looked up to her. Wanted to be her.
But she's long gone.
JUST LIKE ME?

So far...
from me.
NINO,
IS THAT YOU?
GIORGI IS HERE
EH?
LEAVE THE BASKET
YOU'LL FIND HIM IN THE ATELIER
THANK YOU

GIO.
HOW ARE YOU, NINO?
YOU'VE OUTDONE YOURSELF—AGAIN
THE FEMALE COSTUMES ARE EXQUISITELY STITCHED
WHAT WOULDN'T I GIVE FOR YOU TO STITCH MINE
THE CHIEF EMBROIDERER WOULD NOT BE PLEASED

A SWORDSMAN WOULDN'T LOOK OUT OF PLACE WITH SOME ADORNMENTS, I SHOULD THINK.
INDEED
THEY WOULD LOOK WONDERFUL ON YOU
HOW IS EVERYONE?
NEVER BETTER
THEY CAN'T WAIT TO PERFORM
I LOOK FORWARD TO THAT
...
NINO?
THE TRUTH IS...

I WOULD LOVE TO DECORATE YOUR CLOTHES MYSELF.
I KNOW YOU'D CARRY IT OFF.
BUT MOTHER SAYS MEN'S CLOTHING SHOULD BE PLAIN AND MASCULINE.
STITCHING FLOWERS OUT OF THREAD,
ADDING BEADS AND SEQUINS OF EVERY COLOR—
THERE'S NOTHING I LOVE MORE THAN WORKING ON A DANCE COSTUME.
BUT IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME THING.
THE DANCE DETERMINES WHICH COLORS TO USE, AND THE DESIGN AS WELL.
ALL I DO IS TRANSFER THEM TO THE CLOTHES, WHICH ARE CUT THE SAME WAY.
MY COSTUMES LOOK EXACTLY LIKE THOSE MADE BEFORE MY TIME.
IT'S AS IF I'D LEFT NO MARK AT ALL.

I FEAR...
I'LL BE NO MORE THAN A SPECK OF DUST, INSIGNIFICANT AND FORGOTTEN.
I THINK ABOUT IT EVERY NIGHT,
BEFORE I GO TO SLEEP.
...
I'M SORRY.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M TELLING YOU THIS.
...
NINO,
COME WITH ME.

HOW MUCH FARTHER?
VERY FAR!
ENOUGH WITH YOUR JOKES.
THIS IS OUR DESTINATION FOR TODAY
?
MT. KAZBEK...
IS BEST VIEWED FROM THIS SPOT.

THE KAZBEGURI EMBODIES THE HEART AND SOUL OF US MOUNTAIN FOLK
TAP
EVEN IF ONE DAY KARTVELIANS SHOULD SURRENDER THEIR HOMES AND THEIR MOUNTS,
OUR PRIDE AND SPIRIT SHALL LIVE ON THROUGH THIS DANCE
ITS FORM AND SOUND MAY CHANGE GRADUALLY
WE, THE DANCERS, ARE MERELY THE MEDIUM
CONNECTING TODAY AND THE DAYS TO COME

THE SAME APPLIES TO YOU AND EMBROIDERY.
TRADITION IS BUILT OVER THE YEARS, LAYER BY LAYER.
YOUR RIGHT HAND IS ONE OF THE BUILDERS.
YOU MAY BE BUT ONE SPECK OF DUST NOW,
BUT THAT DUST IS THE SEED OF A BEAUTIFUL STONE FLOWER.
THAT IS WHY I DANCE,
LOVING THE OLD AND THE NEW EQUALLY.

NOW, NINO, DON'T YOU THINK...
WE HAVE THE MOST FANTASTIC WORK IMAGINABLE?
"You should feel free to stitch whatever you want, Nuiko
Yes, each established motif has a purpose to its beauty.
But as long as you have respect, you don't have to follow it to the letter.
If your grandpa hears me, he'll be furious."

"He is, after all, very set in his ways."
YEAH...
I WANTED TO BE LIKE GRANDMA
SHE'S MY YARDSTICK, AND I DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE IT
BECAUSE SHE WAS THE ONE PERSON GRANDPA EVER ACKNOWLEDGED AS AN ARTIST
I DON'T LIKE TO ADMIT IT, BUT TALENT IS SOMETHING YOU'RE JUST BORN WITH
I DON'T THINK ABOUT WHETHER I CAN DO IT. I JUST WANT TO TRY. I NEED TO
EVEN THOUGH I DON'T HAVE ANY SPECIAL SKILLS
WHAT IF IT'S BEYOND YOU?

IF YOU STILL CAN'T?
UMM... I'LL TRY AGAIN.
I'LL KEEP TRYING UNTIL I CAN
EVERY EFFORT IS A STEP CLOSER
IF I LOSE TRACK, I WON'T BE ME ANYMORE.
THERE'S NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT.
GIRLS...
...
...
NUIKO...

AKARI?
...
...IT'S TIME YOU SHOWERED.
SORRY WHAT IS IT?
YES, MOM!
NUIKO!
OK.
YOU GO FIRST
I FORGOT WHAT I WANTED TO SAY.
NEVER MIND

OH? YOU'RE GOING FIRST?
YEAH.

Lovely Strange Dark

ITOMEGURI NO SOBYOU
"A CANVAS OF SPUN YARN"
BY AOI AKI
CHAPTER 5

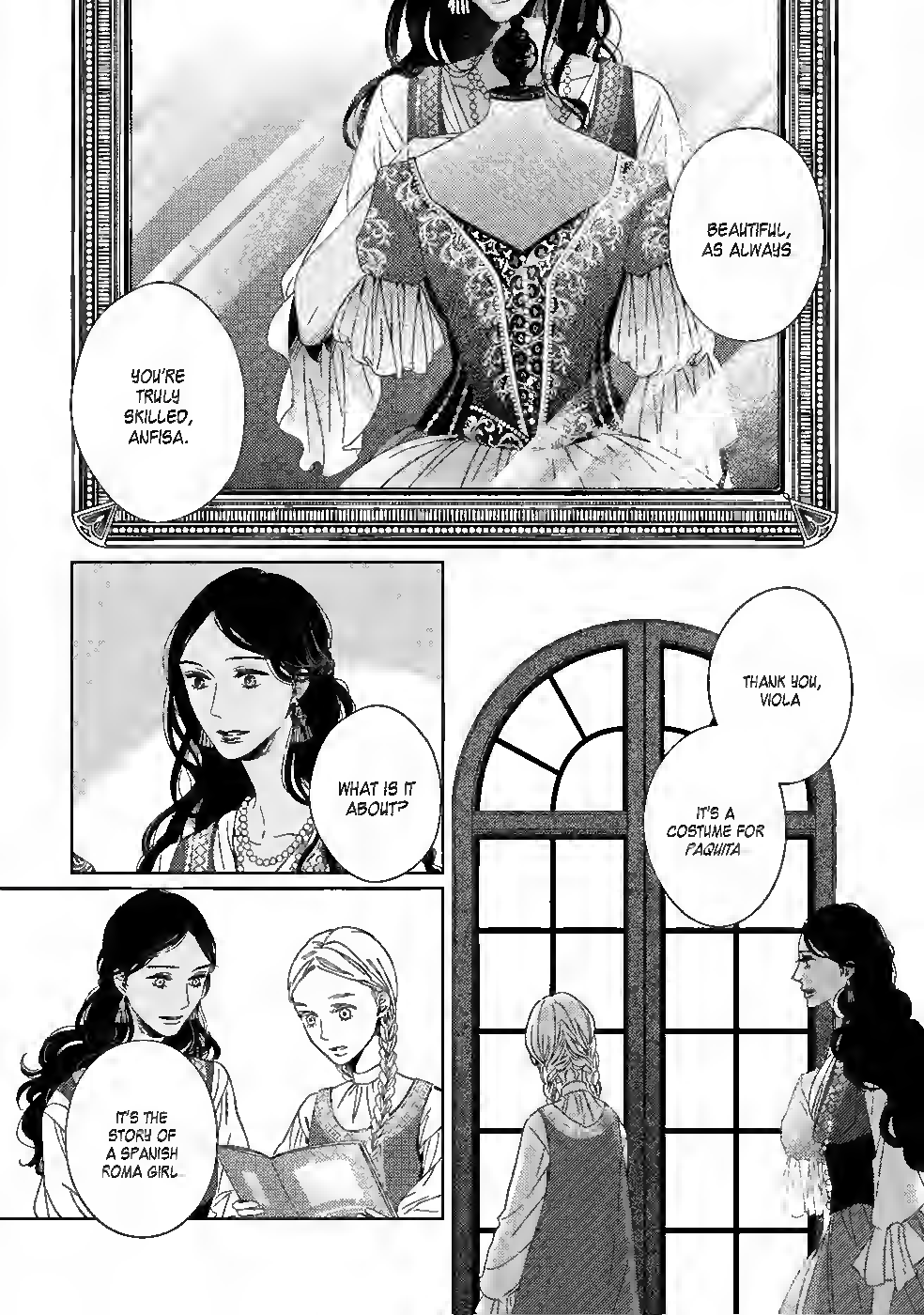
Raws & translation: Kurenai
Editing: Noir Schist
QC: hahhah42

lovelystrangedark.wordpress.com

DOES IT FIT? ARE YOU COMFORTABLE?
CHAPTER FIVE
YES.
IT'S JUST RIGHT
I STUDIED OLD RUSSIAN BALLET COMPANY COSTUMES FOR INSPIRATION,
SINCE I THOUGHT CLASSIC WOULD BE THE WAY TO GO IN YOUR CASE.
IT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU.

THE EMBROIDERY IS GORGEOUS
IT'S CALLED TORZHOK EMBROIDERY
HEAVY BUT ELEGANT
When I go onstage in this outfit,
I'll have quit..
dancing here.

chapter
five


BEAUTIFUL, AS ALWAYS
YOU'RE TRULY SKILLED, ANFISA.
WHAT IS IT ABOUT?
IT'S THE STORY OF A SPANISH ROMA GIRL
THANK YOU, VIOLA
IT'S A COSTUME FOR FAQUITA

In Napoleonic Spain, a beautiful Roma girl named Paquita falls in love with Lucien, a French officer.
However, the Romani leader Inigo is also in love with her. Driven by jealousy, he plots to kill Lucien with poisoned wine.
When she learns of the scheme, Paquita changes the glasses, saving Lucien's life.
The two expose Inigo's fellow conspirator, who happens to be the governor of the province, and the plot is brought to an end.
Lucien asks Paquita for her hand in marriage but is rejected, for she feels she is too far beneath him.
A fortunate twist of fate reveals that Paquita, too, had been born into French aristocracy.
The ballet closes with the celebration of their wedding.
HMMM.

IF I WERE PAQUITA, I WOULD PUT MY FOOT DOWN AND FIGHT.
SO THIS CINDERELLA IS HERSELF A HIGHBORN...
I AGREE
SHE'S TOO ACCEPTING OF HER LOT. NO AMBITION AT ALL.
EARN IT! HOW?
NOW, IF I HAD ANY HAND IN THE STORY, SHE'D REMAIN A ROMA GIRL AND WORK HARD TO EARN HER HAPPINESS.

HOW VERY LIKE YOU.
SHE COULD CHARM THEM ALL WITH HER LOVELY VOICE.
THEY'D WELCOME HER INTO THEIR HOME. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.
OF COURSE!
IT'S THE STORY OF MY DREAMS.
AH HA HA
YOU, SETTLE DOWN?
HMMM.
I CAN'T QUITE PICTURE MYSELF LIVING IN ONE PLACE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE
I WONDER.

I DO THINK...
I'D LEAVE HOME
I'D WANT TO TRAVEL THE WORLD TO SING...
VIOLA,
HAVE YOU PICKED A DATE ALREADY?
I HAVE.
THE WEEK AFTER THE NEXT HARVEST FESTIVAL.

I SEE
WHAT IS IT LIKE, TRAVELING FROM PLACE TO PLACE?
...
VERY EXHAUSTING.
BUT ALSO A LITTLE EXCITING.
I'M NOT PAQUITA. NOT MANY PLACES WILL HAVE ME.
BUT ONCE I HAVE A DESTINATION, I WILL GO THERE
OTHERWISE, I'D BE LOST FOREVER.

I ONLY VISIT A PLACE ONCE
THE AIR,
THE PEOPLE...
THEY REPRESENT A STAGE OF MY LIFE.
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF,
VIOLA

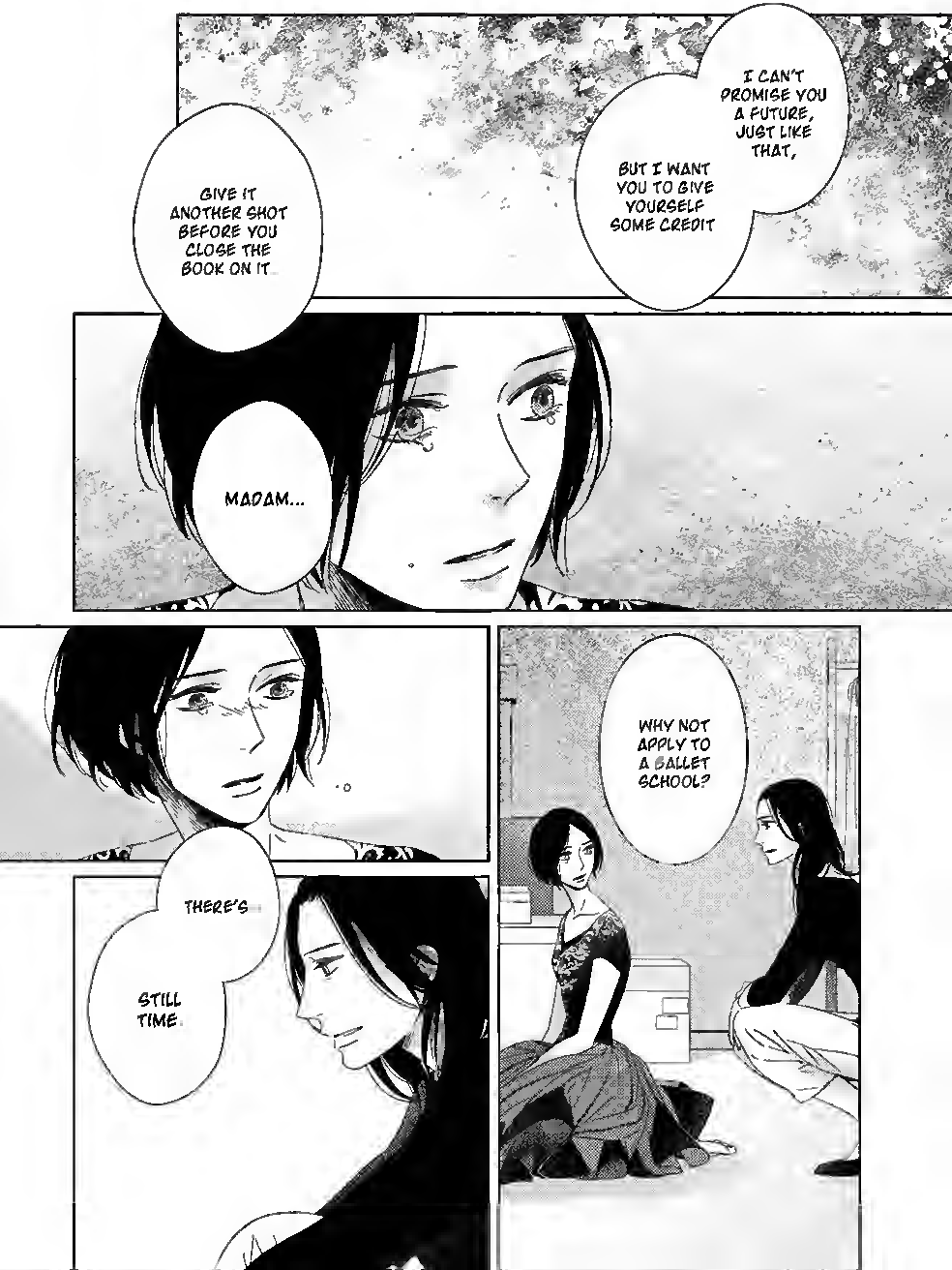
IT'S WONDERFUL.
I STITCHED IT IN ACANTHUS ARABESQUE.
ORNAMENTAL LEAVES TO ADORN THE MANY PLACES YOU'LL BE VISITING.
I ALSO PUT IN SOME VIOLETS—YOUR NAMESAKE FLOWER.
THE STEMS ARE THERE TO CONNECT US.
MAY THE PLANTS THAT COVER THIS EARTH AND WILD, BEAUTIFUL VIOLETS...
PROTECT YOU ON YOUR TRAVELS.
THANK YOU, ANFISA.

You don't know...
where your choices take you.
But...
TAKE CARE...
THIS...
IS THE LAST TIME...
MADAM...
It ends here,
when I step into that point of time with no sound.

I'VE
ALREADY
DECIDED TO QUIT.
TO LET GO.
BUT I...
AKARI
I WANT TO KEEP DANCING.
IF I LOSE TRACK, I WON'T BE ME ANYMORE

I know I should stop dreaming.
That I should focus on my studies.
Get into university. Get a job. Get a life.
IF I LOSE BALLET,
I HAVE NOTHING LEFT.
WITHOUT IT,
I AM NOTHING.
AKARI,
HOW DO YOU DEFINE TALENT?

PERSONALLY,
I THINK IT MEANS, FOR THE MOST PART, THE ABILITY TO WORK FOR SOMETHING
TO FORGE AHEAD EVEN WHEN YOU'RE TIRED.
TO KEEP GOING, WITHOUT EVER GIVING UP.
TO PUSH HARDER THAN OTHER PEOPLE, EVERY SINGLE DAY.
YOU DO NEED A BIT OF A KNACK FOR IT, THOUGH.
IT'S A SIMPLE CONCEPT, REALLY, BUT ALSO THE MOST COMPLICATED.
TALENT IS EARNED.
I'VE WATCHED YOU FOR A LONG TIME—
I KNOW THAT YOU'RE MORE DRIVEN THAN OTHER PEOPLE.
YOU CAN RUN YOUR OWN SHOW NOW.

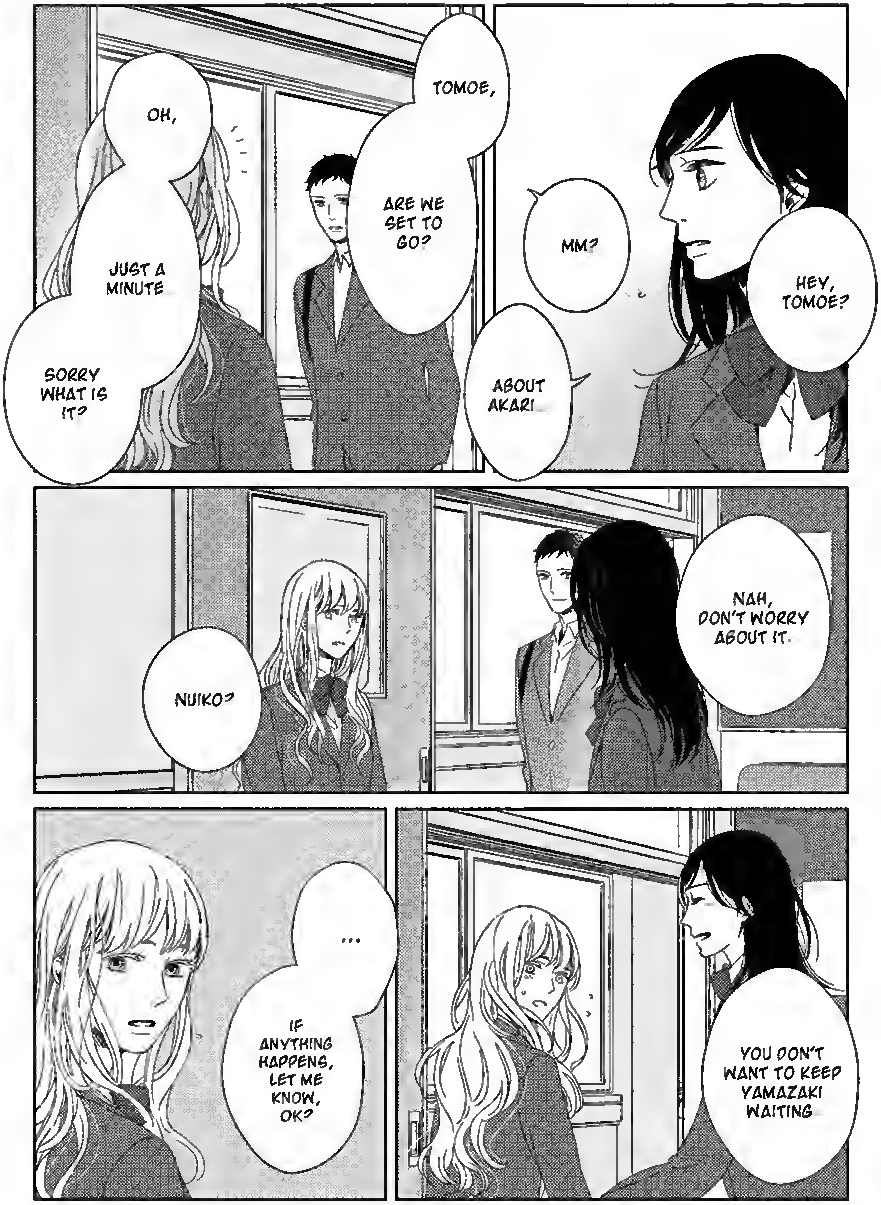

I CAN'T PROMISE YOU A FUTURE, JUST LIKE THAT,
BUT I WANT YOU TO GIVE YOURSELF SOME CREDIT
GIVE IT ANOTHER SHOT BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE BOOK ON IT
MADAM...
WHY NOT APPLY TO A BALLET SCHOOL?
THERE'S STILL TIME.

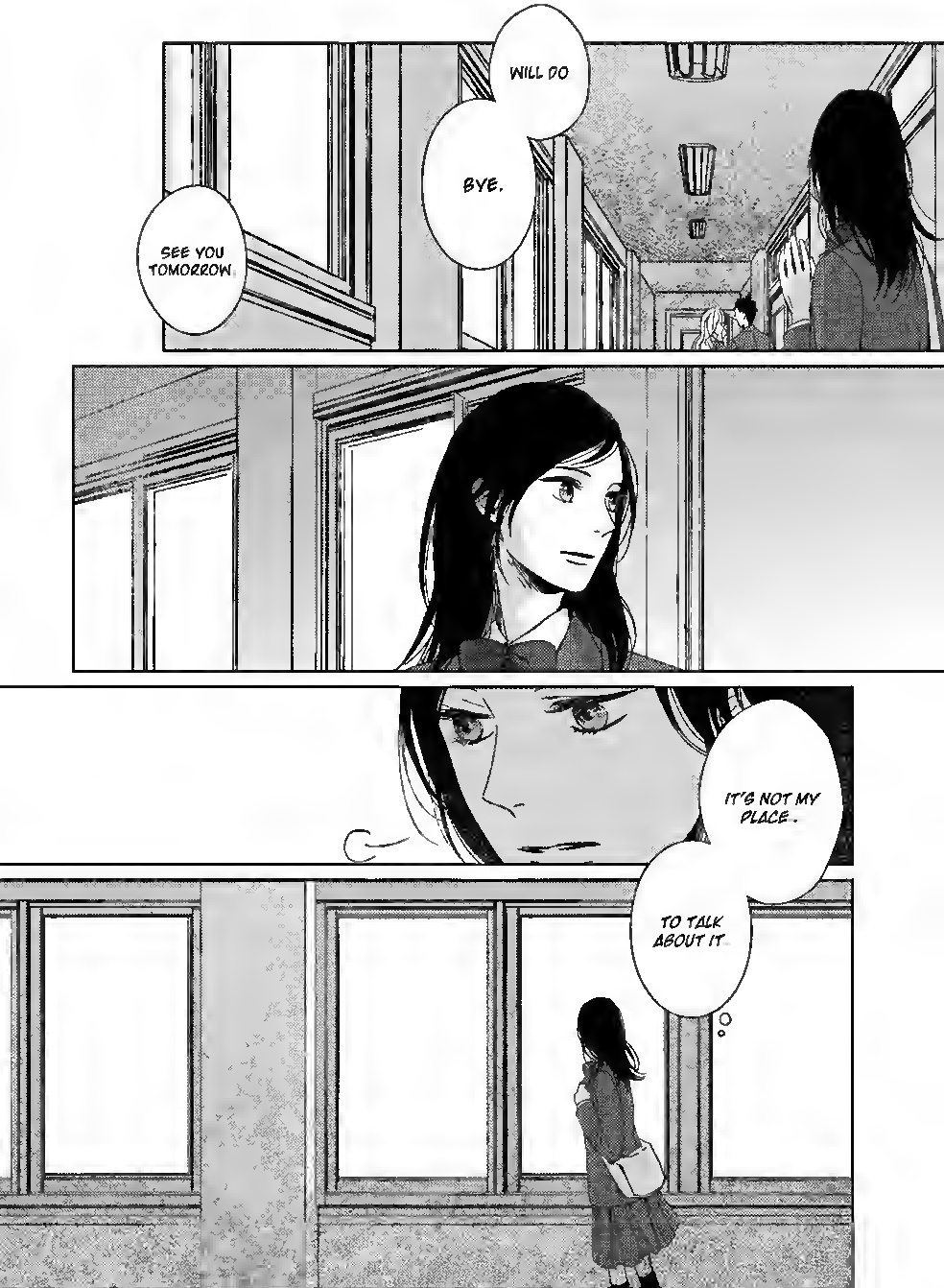
IT WON'T BE EASY, OF COURSE.
YOU'LL HAVE TO CONVINCE YOUR PARENTS
MADAM,
I—
BUT BEFORE YOU CAN ENTER THROUGH THE STRAIT GATE,
FIRST YOU NEED TO TAKE A STEP FORWARD.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO GIVE UP ON DANCING.
I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GREAT LOSS

IT'S A REAL PLEASURE TO WATCH YOU DANCE...
BECAUSE YOUR ENTIRE BEING SAYS YOU LOVE DANCING.

WHERE'S AKARI?
SHE ALREADY LEFT FOR HER BALLET LESSONS.
OH.

IS THAT YOU, NUIKO?


HEY, TOMOE?
MM?
ABOUT AKARI
TOMOE, ARE WE SET TO GO?
OH, JUST A MINUTE
SORRY WHAT IS IT?
NAH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
NUIKO?
YOU DON'T WANT TO KEEP YAMAZAKI WAITING
...
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, LET ME KNOW, OK?


SEE YOU TOMORROW.
BYE.
WILL DO
IT'S NOT MY PLACE.
TO TALK ABOUT IT

Lovely Strange Dark

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chapter
six

"SHE MUST HAVE REALLY LOVED EMBROIDERY."
"JUST LIKE YOU."
"I'M NOTHING LIKE YOU."
NUIKO
...
!
GRANDPA.

...
YOU'RE NOT MAKING MUCH PROGRESS, ARE YOU?
WHAT?!
THEY'RE GRANDMA'S—
YOU'RE TOO FICKLE WHEN IT COMES TO NEEDLEWORK
I WISH SHE HADN'T LEFT HER SCRAPS TO YOU
...
YOU'RE ALL OVER THE PLACE.
IF YOUR HEART'S NOT IN IT, YOU'LL END UP WITH SOMETHING SUBPAR

...
GRANDMA TREASURED EVERY ONE OF THEM.
HOW COULD HE CALL THEM SCRAPS?
WHY IS IT NOT WORKING OUT?
I JUST WANTED TO HAVE A GOOD TIME...
DOING SOMETHING I LOVE

ACTUALLY...
FAVORITE COLOR IS PURPLE...
THEN WHY DO YOU USE RED?
COLORED THREAD IS EXPENSIVE*...
BESIDES... PURPLE IS THE COLOR OF SORROW
SUCH A FOREBODING COLOR HAS NO PLACE ON AN APRON

*RED THREAD WAS MORE COMMON.

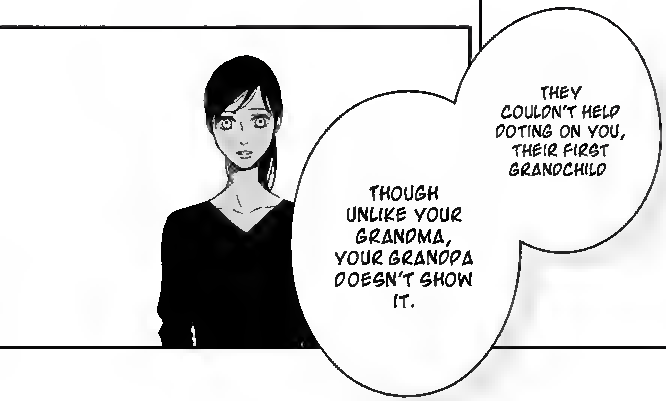
GRANDMAMA,
I'M SORRY I TOOK SO LONG
I STITCHED PLENTY OF PURPLE FLOWERS FOR YOU.
I MADE A MATCHING SCARF FOR MYSELF

With the passage of time,
threads that were once white had gained some colors.
WHEN IT'S TIME TO LEAVE OFF MOURNING, I WILL BE WEARING IT STILL
AFTER ALL, PURPLE IS MY FAVORITE COLOR, TOO.
Here's hoping there will be more colors to come.
so one may express one's love more freely.

I CAN'T DO IT...
IT'S NOT GOING ANY-WHERE
AH, THAT ONE MEANS...
MITSUKO...
HI THERE, NUI.
HI.
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?
I'M EXPECTING ANY DAY NOW,
SO I THOUGHT I'D COME BY AND LEARN HOW TO STITCH SEMORI.
SEMORI?
YOU DON'T REMEMBER, NUIKO?

I'M SURE YOU'VE SEEN IT ON THE BACKS OF YOUR BABY CLOTHES
OH
THAT
SO THAT'S WHAT IT'S CALLED
IT'S A TRADITIONAL EMBROIDERY TO PROTECT CHILDREN
BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, YOUR GRANDPA COLLECTED ALL THE DESIGNS HE COULD FIND
HE AND YOUR GRANDMA HAD A HARD TIME PICKING OUT THE RIGHT ONE FOR YOU
GRANDPA DID?
THEY LET ME DO THE STITCHING MYSELF
NOT YOUR SHICHI-GO-SAN* KIMONO, THOUGH THAT WAS ALL THEM

*A RITE OF PASSAGE AND FESTIVAL DAY CELEBRATED ON NOVEMBER 15 FOR GIRLS AGED THREE (SAN) AND SEVEN (SHICHI), AND FOR BOYS AGED THREE AND FIVE (GO)


THEY COULDN'T HELP DOTING ON YOU, THEIR FIRST GRANDCHILD
THOUGH UNLIKE YOUR GRANDMA, YOUR GRANDPA DOESN'T SHOW IT.

GRANDPA.
YES
WHAT IS IT?
DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE?
THESE ARE ALL THE STITCHES I COPIED FROM GRANDMA'S COLLECTION.

I DO FEEL BAD, THOUGH, FOR SLACKING OFF WITH MY ASSIGNMENT...
BECAUSE I HAVE TOO MANY THINGS GOING ON IN MY HEAD
BUT EVER SINCE I STARTED COPYING DESIGNS AND TECHNIQUES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES,
I'VE GOTTEN MORE AND MORE EXCITED TO STITCH THE JAPANESE WAY
YOU PROBABLY THINK IT'S ALL POINTLESS
SO PLEASE, GRANDPA
BUT I PROMISE I'LL GET BACK TO IT,
AND THIS TIME I'LL DO A PROPER JOB OF IT
GIVE ME SOME TIME UNTIL THEN

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU GET YOUR WILLFULNESS FROM?
NUIKO,
I THINK IT'S GOOD THAT YOU'RE LEARNING ON TOP OF PRODUCING SOMETHING.
HOWEVER, I STILL WANT YOU TO DEDICATE YOURSELF TO JAPANESE EMBROIDERY.
GRANDPA...
BUT IN THE END SHE NEVER HAD ENOUGH TIME FOR STITCHING THE THINGS SHE WANTED
AT MY AGE, I CAN SAFELY SAY THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME FOR ANYTHING.
SHE HAD A GIFT WITH HER HANDS, YOUR GRANDMOTHER

NUIKO,
MAYBE SOMEDAY YOU'LL HAVE REGRETS,
JUST AS SHE DID.
...
BUT...
GRANDMA ALWAYS LOOKED LIKED SHE HAD A GREAT TIME
IF I COULD BE LIKE THAT,
I'M SURE I WON'T HAVE ANY REGRETS

YOU TWO
ARE SO MUCH ALIKE
DON'T DO THINGS BY HALVES
I HAVE NOTHING MORE TO SAY ON THIS SUBJECT
OK.
THANK YOU, GRANDPA
I'M GLAD WE TALKED IT OUT

You'd think you know someone inside out because you see them every day.
But that wasn't the case at all. I hardly knew my own grandpa.
It seems obvious now,
but communication is key to our relationships.
NUIKO
YOU'RE STILL HERE?
I HAD SOMETHING TO DO
GOING HOME?
HANG ON I'LL BE A MINUTE
WE HAVEN'T WALKED HOME TOGETHER IN AGES
YOU SEEM TO BE BUSY

CAREER OPTIONS?
YEAH.
RIGHT.
YOU HAVE YOUR BALLET, TOO.
...
NU—
AKARI,
WHATEVER YOU DO,
I HAVE YOUR BACK.

I KNOW..
THERE'S SOMETHING BOTHERING YOU
AND I JUST NOW REALIZED YOU CAN'T KEEP IT BOTTLED UP
HUH?
SO...
NO MATTER WHAT IT IS,
I'LL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU

I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT
NUIKO...
...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME ABOUT IT,
THOUGH YOU'LL PROBABLY FEEL BETTER IF YOU DO
NUIKO...

.. I...
WAS THIS CLOSE TO QUITTING BALLET FOR GOOD
I EVEN TOOK IT OUT ON YOU.
I COULDN'T TELL YOU BECAUSE YOU KNEW WHAT YOU WANTED.
AKARI...
I WASN'T ABLE TO LET GO
STILL...
I GOT A HAIRCUT TO PREPARE MYSELF MENTALLY.

BUT...
I'VE HAD IT WITH MOPING AROUND
...
I'M GOING TO APPLY FOR A SPOT IN BALLET SCHOOLS IN RUSSIA AND HUNGARY.
IF I GET IN, I'LL LEAVE IN THE SUMMER.
YOU'RE GOING ABROAD
AH!
WHAT ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL?

I HAVEN'T SHOT MY AUDITION YET—PLANNING TO TODAY.
I WAS GOING TO TELL YOU AFTER
IT'S A THREE-YEAR PROGRAM, SO IF I'M IN, I'LL DROP OUT OF SCHOOL
I'M SORRY, NUIKO
YOU WERE WORRIED ABOUT ME, RIGHT?
I...
LOVE BALLET.
I WON'T BE SECOND-GUESSING MYSELF ANYMORE.

...
GO FOR IT!
I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT.
YEAH, THANK YOU

GOOD LUCK, AKARI
I'LL DO MY BEST, TOO.
You're probably going to regret your choices some day.
But it's better than giving up now by miles.
Isn't that right, Grandma?
YES
READY, AKARI?
OK, WE'RE ALL SET HERE.

THIS IS ONLY A VIDEO AUDITION,
SO DANCE THE WAY YOUR HEART TELLS YOU TO
I WILL

YOU CAN START RECORDING.

Lovely Strange Dark

ITOMEGURI NO SOBYOU
"A CANVAS OF SPUN YARN"
BY AOI AKI
CHAPTER 7

Raws & translation: Kurenai
Editing: Noir Schist
QC: hahhah42

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chapter
seven

Behind
your eyelids...

...threads of light pass through.
They form phantoms between each blink of your eye.

What's on the other end...
that reels them back?

Nobody can tell.
WE THOUGHT YOU'D WELCOME A SPARE PAIR FOR PRACTICE
GORGEOUS
WE HOPE THEY COME IN HANDY
TOMOE BOUGHT THESE I DARNED THEM AND ADDED A BIT OF EMBROIDERY

THAT'S THE IDEA!
BETTER WORN THAN STASHED AWAY.
TRAIN AP-PROACH-ING. PLEASE STAND BEHIND THE WHITE LINE.
THEY'RE TOO GOOD FOR PRACTICE.
I'D WEAR THEM OUT.
AKARI, IT'S TIME.
COMING!
TOMOE, NUIKO,
FOR EVERYTHING.
THANK YOU...

AKARI,
THIS IS IT
I'M GOING
TAKE CARE!

BYE, GUYS.
YEAH.
After many auditions,
Akari was finally accepted at a ballet school in Hungary
She left Japan before the end of summer.

Days and months roll by in a flash.
Connected.
Discon-nected
GYNECOLOGY
Reconnected.

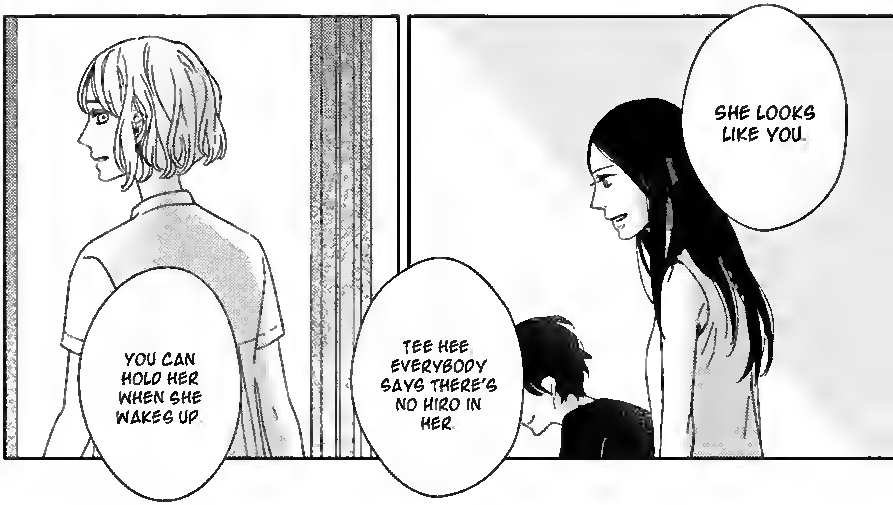
Like colorful stitches...
along the fabric.

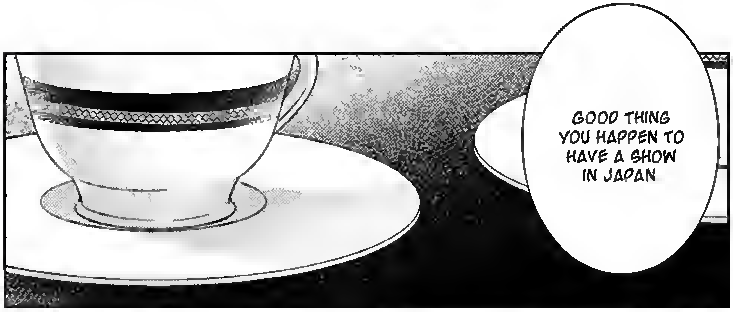
RING RING
HELLO, AKARI?
ARE YOU HERE ALREADY?
GOTCHA I'LL COME AND GET YOU AT THE TRAIN STATION
LATER

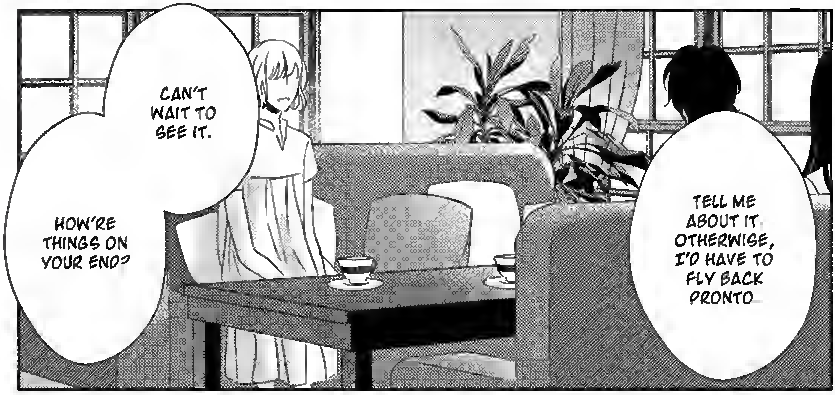
AKARI!
HERE I AM.
WELCOME BACK!
SORRY FOR ALL THE TROUBLE.
NAH, IT'S NO PROBLEM.
IT'S BEEN, WHAT, THREE YEARS?
LAST TIME WE SAW EACH OTHER WAS AT A FRIEND'S WEDDING. YUP, THREE YEARS, ALL RIGHT.

HOW'S TOMOE?
SHE'S GOOD. HAPPY
LIKE SHE DESERVES TO BE.
SHE ALMOST GAVE UP, YOU KNOW, AFTER YEARS OF TRYING
I'M SO GLAD THOSE DARK DAYS ARE BEHIND HER NOW
YEAH
YOU'RE RIGHT

AKARI! SO GOOD TO SEE YOU!
LONG TIME NO SEE, TOMOE
THANKS FOR HAVING US
THANKS FOR DRIVING HER HERE, NUIKO COME ON IN
SHE'S AS ADORABLE AS EVER
OOH, SHE'S SO TINY.
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BE QUIET ABOUT IT
I'M SORRY I JUST GOT HER TO SLEEP


SHE LOOKS LIKE YOU.
TEE HEE EVERYBODY SAYS THERE'S NO HIRO IN HER.
YOU CAN HOLD HER WHEN SHE WAKES UP.


GOOD THING YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE A SHOW IN JAPAN


CAN'T WAIT TO SEE IT.
HOW'RE THINGS ON YOUR END?
TELL ME ABOUT IT. OTHERWISE, I'D HAVE TO FLY BACK PRONTO.

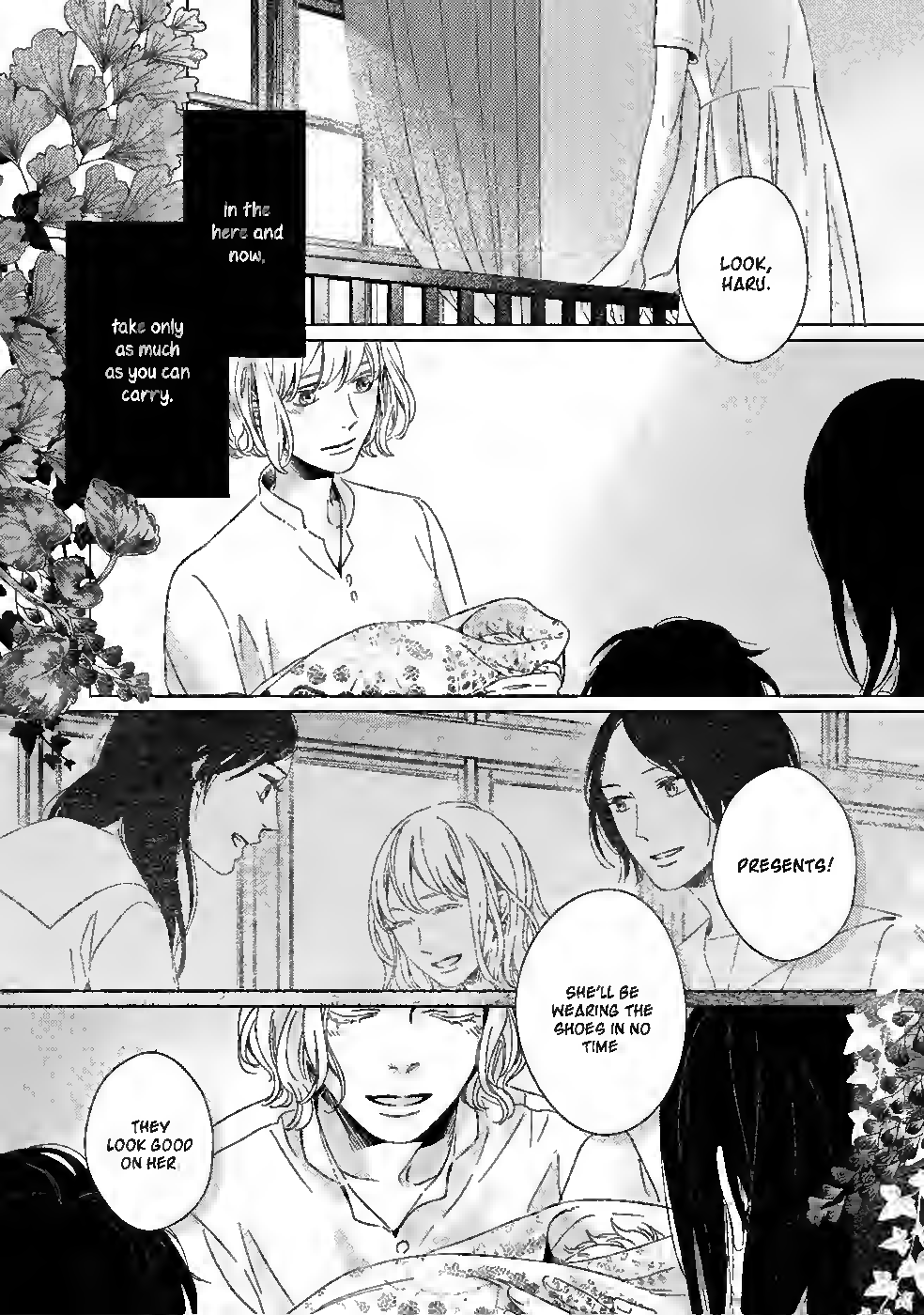
UMMM.
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I'M BARELY KEEPING UP
CRAZY ROUTINES?
THERE'S THAT. AND I'M ALL TOO AWARE I'M NOWHERE NEAR AS GOOD AS I WANT TO BE. I'M STILL STUCK IN THE CORPS DE BALLET.
I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF THEY GAVE ME THE BOOT.
IT CAN'T BE
IT IS WHAT IT IS
BUT I GET TO DANCE EVERY DAY.
THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR NOW

THE FUTURE WILL ALWAYS BE A MYSTERY, NO MATTER HOW OLD YOU GET.
THERE'S THE FAMILY BUSINESS, TOO.
I FEEL LIKE I'M FINALLY MAKING SOME PROGRESS.
I'M NOWHERE NEAR THERE YET.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, NUIKO? YOU'RE STARTING A NEW LINE, RIGHT?
YEAH. I'M PREPARED.
TOMOE, LOOKS LIKE THINGS WILL GET BUSIER FOR YOU.
THE MORE I LEARN, THE FUSSIER GRANDPA GETS.
SAME OL' GRANDPA.

THAT REMINDS ME
BABY SHOWER GIFTS
OH, THANK YOU!
HERE'S MINE.
I GOT IT BACK IN HUNGARY
YEAH. SHE'S NOT OLD ENOUGH TO WEAR THEM, BUT I MADE THEM HOPING FOR THE BEST.
NUIKO..
THESE ARE BABY SHOES?

AKARI, YOU GOT HER A BABY BUNTING? IT'S LIKE IT CAME IN A SET WITH NUIKO'S SHOES.
SHE'S LUCKY TO HAVE YOU MAKE HER FIRST PAIR OF SHOES.
I APPRECI-ATE IT.
I DIDN'T EXACTLY GO TRADITIONAL JAPANESE WITH THE SHOES.
TRUE, THEY'RE WELL-MATCHED. THOUGH THAT'S HUNGARIAN EMBROIDERY ON MINE
GLAD YOU LIKE IT.
THIS ONE'S FOR YOU, NUIKO.
THANK YOU SO MUCH, YOU TWO! I'LL TREASURE THEM.

A SAMPLER!
WHOA! WHAT IS IT? IS IT OK IF I OPEN IT HERE?
SURE.
THAT'S THE EMBROIDERY MANIAC WE KNOW AND LOVE.
PRETTY STITCHES, AND IN GOOD CONDITION, TOO.
OH, YEAH I REMEMBER HOW, BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL, I'D GO TO THE FLEA MARKET EVERY DAY AND STARE AT THE SAMPLERS BEING SOLD
NO. SHE'S PROBABLY JUST HUNGRY
ACK.
WAS THAT TOO LOUD? SORRY.
goo—
waaah...
JUST LOOK AT THE COLORS—


in the here and now,
take only as much as you can carry.
LOOK, HARU.
PRESENTS!
SHE'LL BE WEARING THE SHOES IN NO TIME
THEY LOOK GOOD ON HER

Pick your colors and stitch...
as you envision
your pattern.
GOOD MORNING, HARU!
HELLO
NICE TO MEET YOU

End

After Episode

Nuiko

At the thumbnailing stage, my plot or character back-story tends to change Nuiko, however, is a character that strayed from my initial plans as I wrote the story. She was supposed to have a more complex background, but since I wanted her and Akari to be like yin and yang, that had to go. In the end, she turned out to be the simplest and easiest to write out of the three characters.

From here on out, she divides her time between designing clothing with artisans she's long known and friends from her university days, putting her personal projects on exhibitions, and helping out with the family business.

Akari

Although Nuiko is the main character, Akari's viewpoint is the focus of the story. I already had her down as an aspiring ballerina, but after starting the story, I came across an interview with a professional ballet dancer. It mentioned facing complexes and challenging destiny, which was a revelation. I decided to work it into the character.

While this story was running in the magazine, I went to see the *Ballets Russes: the art of costume* exhibition at the National Art Center, Tokyo. Seeing the costumes up close, I got a sense of the passion and drama behind the stage. I think it had some influence on the chapter that revolved around her at the time.

Her days are occupied with rehearsals and performances, though she does come back to Japan from time to time. While perpetually single, she likes children. So when she comes to Japan, she brings plenty of gifts for Tomoe's and Nuiko's children, her source of happiness.

Tomoe

Being an introvert, Tomoe knows herself inside out. She has her fears, but at the end of the day, she's unswayed. Here is a character born from stories told by several of my friends during our school days. She's not particularly beautiful, but she has this calm aura that guys find attractive. Which made her face the hardest, but the most fun to draw.

As a mother, she grapples with the challenges of parenting and housework, falling and bouncing back. Once she has it under control, she starts helping out at Nuiko's embroidery workshop, geared toward parents and children, in between household chores.

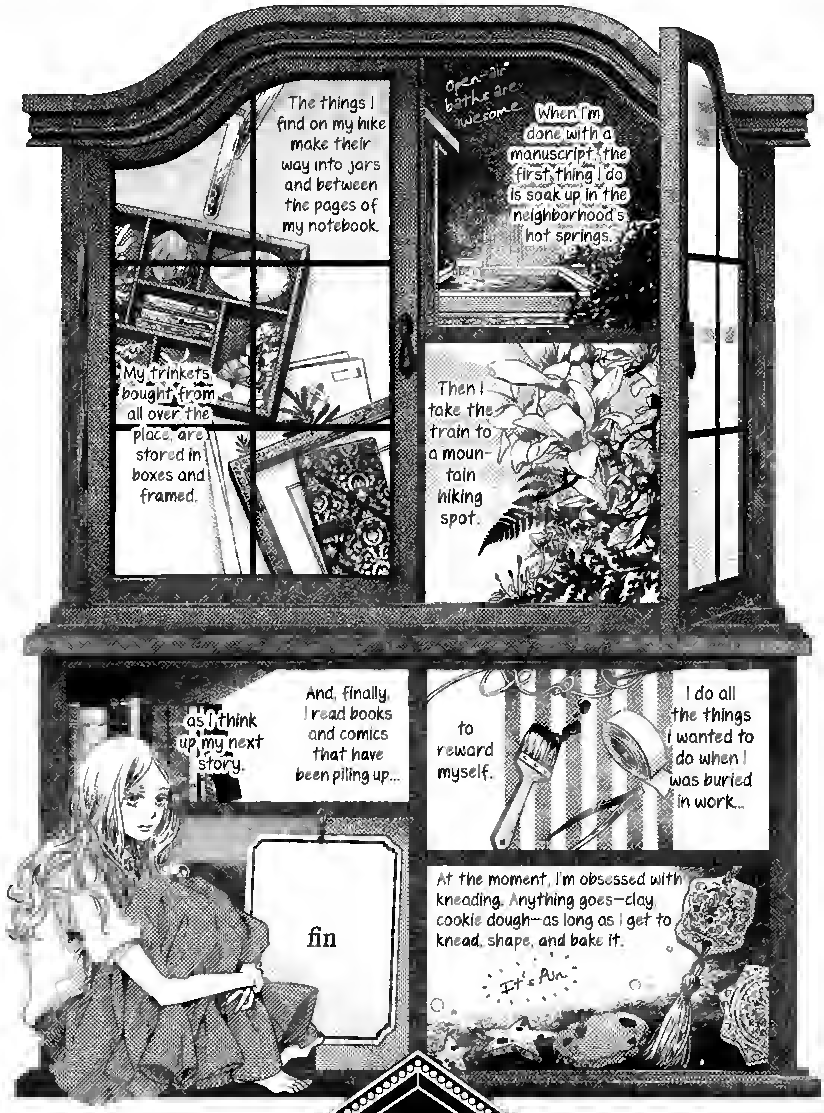
stroke
stroke
stroke
Silk caressing your palms,
plied over the bobbin
stroke
Katsura-yori.
How you twist the strands,,
influences the threads texture and sheen,
giving it a unique color and character.

A WORTHY FIRST EFFORT.
GOOD JOB, NUIKO.
Broken threads will be fixed as many times as need be,
as long as these fingers are in motion.
ALL RIGHT.
LET'S GET ON WITH IT.

End

living with
dogs
Back when I was still living with my family, we had two dogs
and a bunch of other animals
But they were precious, and I loved them
When I tried to take them on a walk, they sulked
When I tried to hug them they ran away
As social animals, dogs have a hierarchy. The youngest of the pack is at the very bottom.
In our home, that was me
They have their own personalities
Enjoying the car ride when going out
Sitting by the window all day long like a cat
Even though dogs come in all shapes and sizes, they are—believe it or not—a single species.

And I'll never forget where I was when I got the news on a subway platform in a faraway city
Fortunately, I'd gone back for a visit not long before that, so I got to see them
I'll never forget holding their heads as they breathed their last.
If having pets has taught me anything, it's that it boils down to outliving them.
Some day, when I can afford it, I'd like to keep dogs again.
In my dreams
I'm grateful to have known them in the time they graced our home, our best friends.
But more than that, I have fond memories of them, of their warmth and their shaggy fur.
That's a good enough reason to have dogs for your roommates
I would love to ruffle their soft, soft fur and play harmonica as they sing along.
a cold-loving, hyper Bernese mountain dog
and
A shih tzu huddling in the snow
They're fun and adorable— I just love them!


The things I find on my hike make their way into jars and between the pages of my notebook.
My trinkets bought from all over the place, are stored in boxes and framed.
open-air baths are awesome
When I'm done with a manuscript, the first thing I do is soak up in the neighborhood's hot springs.
Then I take the train to a mountain hiking spot.
I do all the things I wanted to do when I was buried in work...
to reward myself.
And, finally, I read books and comics that have been piling up...
as I think up my next story.
fin
At the moment, I'm obsessed with kneading. Anything goes—clay cookie dough—as long as I get to knead, shape, and bake it.
It's Fun
essay

Postscript

Thank you for reading this book

The story is a culmination of ideas inspired by many things in my life. The dreams my friends and I had when we were younger. The problems shared with me by people I hadn't met in a while. The things I can do. The things I can't do.

The main character, Nuiko, is named after a very dear friend of mine, though I changed the spelling. As my story ideas snowballed, it was the only name I could think of that would fit a character with a passion for needle and thread*. Nui, thank you so much for being understanding and for allowing me to use your name.

I would also like to thank Ms. Naoko Shimoda, artiste extraordinaire, who showed me around her atelier and helped me with written resources. Ms. Shimoda has written a number of books on needlework, such as *Naoko Shimoda's Needlework Techniques* and *Artfully Embroidered Motifs and Patterns for Bags and More***. They're wonderful, and everybody should buy them.

Here's hoping this won't be the last time we see each other.
Once again, thank you.

Special Thanks

mom
Yogenme
Hachiko
My editor, Mr. K.
(in no particular order)

*The *nui* in Nuiko means "sewing."
**Available in English from Interweave Press.